

also able and more likely to be successful adoptive families.

Again, I thank Senator KLOBUCHAR for her leadership and for her work.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Thank you.

As you know, our work is never done. We have a number of bills out there for which we have bipartisan support and that we are going to work on.

I think my last statement would be that our kids deserve so much more than just a roof over their heads and a bed to sleep in. Each and every child deserves a loving home, a nurturing family, and a brighter future. That is what National Adoption Month is all about, and that is why Senator BLUNT and I are on the floor today. That is why all of us have a responsibility to carry on this torch and to keep fighting for these children.

I thank Senator BLUNT.

I yield the floor.

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—Continued

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask to speak on one other subject briefly for 2 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PERFORMANCE BONUSES

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today to express my concern that the Department of Veterans Affairs chose to issue performance bonuses to senior executives, including the director of the St. Paul Regional Office of the Veterans Benefits Administration, despite recent revelations of improper and dishonest conduct.

According to a report released by the VA's Office of the Inspector General in September, two VBA executives used their positions to assign themselves to different jobs that involve fewer responsibilities while maintaining their higher salaries. They actually assigned themselves to a different job where they had to work less and then kept their high salaries.

One of them was a woman named Kim Graves, the director of the Veterans Benefits Administration St. Paul Regional Office since October 2014. The inspector general found that Ms. Graves used her influence as director of the VBA's Eastern Area Office to compel the relocation of the previous St. Paul office director. So she moved that person and then moved herself into the job. She then proceeded to submit her own name for consideration and fill the vacancy that she had just created.

Taking on the job of directing the St. Paul Regional Office was actually a step down in responsibility for Ms. Graves. In the inspector general's words, she "went from being responsible for oversight of 16 [regional offices] to being responsible for only 1 [regional office]," but she kept her Senior Executive Service salary of \$173,949 per year. She also received over \$129,000 in relocation expenses.

In spite of this behavior, Ms. Graves received an \$8,687 performance bonus this year. The St. Cloud VA health care system chief of staff, Susan Markstrom, received a performance bonus as well the same year she was reported with some mismanagement issues.

A chief of staff collecting bonuses while running off nurses and doctors and a senior executive using her position to push out one of her colleagues and give herself a plum assignment with fewer responsibilities but the same high salary are the kinds of actions that create a breach of trust. I am generally proud of Veterans Affairs. We obviously have issues in our health system with backlogs and other problems, but there are a lot of hard-working people who work in Veterans Affairs who should be lauded for that work because our veterans deserve nothing but the best.

But in this case, I thank the inspector general for being willing to look into this difficult case and shedding light on what has been happening. The conduct is unacceptable and further erodes trust.

It is commendable that the VA inspector general took action by referring these two cases to the U.S. attorney for possible criminal prosecution. The VA needs to do right by our veterans and taxpayers by holding bad actors accountable and implementing reforms to prevent exploitation such as this from ever happening again.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 310

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I rise today in support of S. 310, the Eliminating Government-funded Oil-painting Act, or the EGO Act. I would like to thank my colleagues, Chairman RON JOHNSON and Ranking Member TOM CARPER of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Their committee considered the EGO Act in its business meeting of June 24, 2015, and reported it favorably without amendment.

The Eliminating Government-funded Oil-painting Act is commonsense legislation that bans the Federal Government from spending taxpayer dollars on oil paintings of Presidents, Vice Presidents, Cabinet Secretaries, or Members of Congress. These paintings can cost as much as \$40,000 and are often placed in a back hall of a government bureaucracy, never to be seen by the public.

I will note that \$40,000 is the same as the average annual wage of a worker in Louisiana. Think about it—that worker worked a whole year, and what she

earned is what the Federal Government will spend on the painting of a Cabinet Secretary who serves for 6 months, and then the painting is put in the back of a building, never to be seen.

With trillions in debt, there is more to do in our obligation to spend taxpayers' money wisely, but this is a start.

I offer my strong support for the EGO Act and urge its passage.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 165, S. 310; I further ask that the bill be read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I have no clue why the esteemed Democratic leader objects. All I can say is that is an incredible insensitivity to working families. I have no clue.

There is a family out there right now struggling, not sure if they can pay their rent or their mortgage. They are going to lose their car. Their children will go to school in old clothes and maybe hungry because the amount of money they earn per year is not enough. They look at people in Washington like a new version of "The Hunger Games"—it is the Capital of this country, and all the riches of this country are brought here to the Capital for paintings of government officials, to be hidden away, while they struggle to make their mortgage, their car note, and to make sure their child is properly fed.

That people in government would be insensitive to those families shows the problem. That people in Washington would be insufficiently aware that the average family is making \$40,000 a year—the same as what one of these paintings can cost—and not care is an indictment of those who do not care.

I regret that there is objection to this, but we will bring it up later.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here to speak in what is probably my 119th "Time to Wake Up" speech related to climate change.

I would like to take this occasion to express my appreciation to a person whom the TV cameras can probably see behind me sitting on the staff bench, Joseph Majkut, who has been a fellow on my staff for over a year now. He has been very instrumental in helping me prepare these speeches. I am grateful to him.

Today, I ask that we imagine a dark castle with looming ramparts and tall towers. It is strongly built, and it is well defended. Its defenders are determined and implacable. They patrol those ramparts and from their castle battlements attack and harass their opponents. The castle's thick walls are built to keep out unwelcome things. In this castle, those unwelcome things are science—the science of climate change; truth—the truth of what carbon pollution does to our atmosphere and oceans; and decency—the human decency, in the face of that information, to try to do the right thing.

This is Denial Castle, the fortress of climate denial constructed by the big polluters. Like many castles, this castle is built on elements that date back to earlier wars. Some parts date back to tobacco companies denying that smoking causes cancer. Some parts of it date back to the lead industries denying that lead paint poisons children. Some parts go back to denial of what acid rain was doing to our New England lakes and denial of what pollution was doing to our atmosphere's ozone layer. There might even be a few bits dating back to denial that seatbelts and airbags were a good idea. But now it is the big carbon polluters who command Denial Castle. They now enjoy the power to pollute for free, so they attack climate science. They send out trolls to disrupt Web sites and blogs. They harass climate scientists. One minion became attorney general of Virginia and so harassed a University of Virginia scientist that Mr. Jefferson's university had to use university lawyers and the State supreme court to get the harassment stopped.

This castle has within it its own little stable of scientists to trot out like trained ponies to create false doubt and uncertainty about the harm carbon pollution causes. Of course, the polluters have mouthpieces, such as the Wall Street Journal editorial page, to help spread their fog of doubt and denial. Most of all, they have weaponry. The weaponry on these dark ramparts is not just pointed outward at science and at the public; those polluter weapons point in, as well, at the Members of Congress who are held hostage inside the castle. This is not just a fortress; it is also a prison. Members know that if they try to escape, the full force of the polluters' political weaponry will fall on them. Many of the hostages are restless, but escape is hazardous. Some are actually happy to help man the ramparts. Look at the effort by Senate Republicans this week to override the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan—our Nation's most significant ef-

fort yet to assert global leadership in staving off the worst effects of climate change.

For those Republican Senators who want out of Denial Castle, escape is hazardous because Citizens United, that shameful Supreme Court decision, armed the polluters on the ramparts with a terrifying new weapon: the threat of massive, sudden, anonymous, unlimited political spending. A Republican in a primary has virtually no defense against that. One minute you are on course to reelection; the next moment a primary opponent has millions of dollars, pounding you with negative ads, and the polluter-funded attack machine has turned on you.

One polluter front group actually warned that anyone who crossed them would be "at a severe disadvantage," and that addressing carbon pollution with a price on carbon would be a "political loser." From a group backed by billionaires now threatening to wield, just in this election, \$750 million in political spending, that is not a very subtle threat.

Of course, a threatened attack doesn't actually have to happen to have its political effect. A threat, a quiet threat, a secret threat can be enough. We will never see those threats unless we are in the backroom where they are made. That is the unacknowledged danger of Citizens United.

What were the five Republican judges thinking when their Citizens United decision unleashed unlimited political spending and its dark twin, the silent threat of that unlimited political spending? This is not an idle concern. By 2 to 1, Americans think the Justices often let political considerations and personal views influence their decisions. Americans massively oppose the Citizens United decision—80 percent against, with 71 percent strongly opposed. Most tellingly, by a ratio of 9 to 1, Americans now believe our Supreme Court treats corporations more favorably than individuals. Even self-identified conservative Republicans by a 4-to-1 margin now believe the Court treats corporations more favorably than individuals.

Linda Greenhouse, who long resisted drawing such a conclusion, has written that she finds it "impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Republican-appointed majority is committed to harnessing the Supreme Court to an ideological agenda." Other noted Court watchers such as Norm Ornstein at the conservative American Enterprise Institute and Jeffrey Toobin long ago reached a similar conclusion.

Let's look carefully at what those five Justices did in their 5-to-4 Citizens United decision. Let's start where they started, with the First Amendment to the Constitution. The First Amendment protects honest elections by allowing limitations on the influence of money. The First Amendment allows limitations on election spending when they reflect a reasonable concern about corruption.

If you are a judge who wants to unleash unlimited corporate money into elections, you need to get around that problem, which they did by making the factual finding that all this corporate money will not present even a risk of corruption, not a chance. That is obviously false, but they said it anyway, which is interesting. But wait, it gets more interesting still. To make that factual finding, they had to break a venerable rule—the rule that appellate courts don't do factfinding. They broke that rule.

They did something else, too. Every time Congress or the Supreme Court had examined corporate corruption in elections, they found a rich, sordid record of corporate corruption of elections. That is American history. The five Justices knew a record like that in the case would have made it pretty hard to find no risk of corporate corruption of elections. All the evidence would go the other way.

How did the five Justices make sure the case had no good evidentiary record on corporate corruption of elections? Very cleverly. They changed the question in the case—what the Court calls the question presented. They changed the question late in the case, after there was any chance to develop a factual record on that new question presented. It is very unusual, but it is exactly what they did. Then they overruled a hundred years of practice and precedent of earlier Courts.

One could argue that each one of these different steps was wrong. Certainly, the ultimate factual finding, that corporate money can't corrupt an election, is way wrong. But the worst wrong is that these steps are linked together in a chain of necessity you must follow to get that result.

What is the chance that these conservative Justices just happened to change the question presented, which just happened to prevent there being a robust factual record on the very question where they just happened to need to make false factual findings about corruption; which just happened, this of all times, to be the time they broke the rule against appellate fact finding; all of which just happened to provide the exact findings of fact necessary to get around that First Amendment leash on corporate political spending?

Put all those steps together, and what you see is Justices behaving not like an umpire evenly calling balls and strikes, but like a locksmith carefully manufacturing a key, each of whose parts is precisely assembled to fit the tumblers and turn a particular lock. The result was amazing new weaponry for the corporate polluter apparatus, political Gatling guns in a field of muskets, which the polluters have deployed very effectively to silence debate about climate change.

Before Citizens United, Republicans regularly stood up to address climate change. A Republican nominee campaigning for President had a strong climate change platform. A Republican

President spoke of its urgency. Republican Senators authored and sponsored big climate change bills. Republican Congressmen voted for the Waxman-Markey bill in the House or wrote articles favoring a carbon tax and then came over and became Senators.

But after Citizens United, there was virtual silence. The polluters used Citizens United's new political artillery to shut debate down.

Money can be speech, but it isn't always. Money can also be bribery, bullying, intimidation, harassment, shouting down, and drowning out. The legendary turn-of-the-century political fixer Mark Hanna once said:

There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can't remember what the second one is.

He didn't say that because money is free speech. Money is political artillery. Look at the munitions. My gosh, most dark money political ads in the last election were negative ads. At times, virtually all on the air have been negative ads. Many ads have been reviewed and deemed false or misleading. At times, a majority of the ads running were deemed false or misleading. That is not debate; that is artillery.

The power to fire that artillery opens the way for secret threats and promises to use or not use that artillery. It does cause corruption when a politician will not vote his conscience because he hears those whispered threats and fears that new artillery. But even with all this new political artillery, the Denier Castle is not as secure as it looks. It is built on a foundation of lies—lies that the science of climate change is unsettled, lies that there is no urgency to this, lies that there will be economic harm if we fix the problem. The truth is exactly the opposite. The effects of carbon pollution are deadly real in our atmosphere and oceans. Time is running out to avoid the worst of the peril, and a sensible political response to climate change actually yields broad economic gains.

The Denier Castle's foundation of lies is slowly crumbling. The cracks are already beginning to appear. Twelve Republican House Members escaped from the castle—far enough to sponsor a climate resolution. Young Republicans—under 35—by a majority think climate denial is ignorant, out of touch, or crazy. Conservative heartland farmers see unprecedented weather in their fields and coastal fishermen see unfamiliar fish in their nets. Corporate climate leadership grows, from Walmart, Coke and Pepsi, Ford and GM, Mars and Unilever, General Mills and many others, and whole industries like the property casualty insurance industry. Of course, well-respected military leaders warn of climate change as danger, a catalyst of conflict. With all that comes the economic tide of lower and lower cost clean energy—energy which is probably cheaper already than fossil fuel, if the energy market weren't rigged by the polluters to favor their dirty product.

The blocks of the Denier Castle are loosening and beginning to fall. Mortar sifts down. The whole structure of deceit and denial is creaking and crumbling. Fear is starting to spread within the castle about what will happen when the lies are exposed and all the bullying revealed. Will there really be no price to pay for all that deceit and denial in a world of justice and consequences?

The Wall Street Journal editorial page has gotten so anxious that it accuses me of "treat[ing] [climate] heretics like Cromwell did Catholics," all because I, the junior Senator of the smallest State, had the temerity to say that mighty ExxonMobil, one of the biggest corporations in the history of the world and a Goliath if there ever were one, should maybe have to tell the truth in the place we trust in America to find the truth—an American courtroom. Exxon has gotten so frantic that their public relations people are starting to use bad language, things I can't even say on the Senate floor.

Even this week's Clean Power Plan challenge has an air of desperation—a last-ditch effort to show the fossil fuel industry that folks have done all they could before they stand down and evacuate the castle. The dark castle will fall, and it will fall abruptly. It will collapse. More hostages will break free, and a torrent will follow. When the lies and political influence are all exposed, there will come a day of reckoning. For all faithful stewards of God's Earth, and for our American democracy, that will be a day of joy, a day of honor, and a day of liberation. Each one of us can push a little harder to make that day come a little sooner. Let us lean into our tasks and to our duty.

I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I want to commend Senators COLLINS and REED for their hard work on this bill. The Senators worked closely together, continuing a great tradition of the Appropriations Committee.

The Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Related Agencies bill has two critical missions. It is Congress' annual infrastructure bill, creating jobs in construction, and it meets compelling human needs by strengthening communities. While I support this bill, I also reaffirm my continued commitment to getting a 12-bill omnibus done by December 11—leaving no bill behind and no Christmas crisis.

This bill keeps Americans on the move, delivering Federal formula funding to every State for highways, byways, and mass transit. Thanks to the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, which increased the discretionary caps by \$50 billion, we are here today to take up the Collins and Reed amendment, adding nearly \$1.6 billion to the Senate Committee bill.

The Collins-Reed amendment increases funding for the Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Tran-

sit Administration's New Starts program, and competitive TIGER grants. It recognizes the importance of the U.S. flag fleet and merchant marines to our national security by increasing funding for the Maritime Security Program. The amendment also restores funding to HUD's Community Development Block Grant and HOME programs. These are programs that every county executive and mayor talk to me about.

For my home State of Maryland, this bill fully funds the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. I am beyond frustrated with Metro, but will not waver in my support for Federal funding to improve the safety and operational reliability of the system because many of my constituents rely upon Metro every day. I included bill and report language requiring strict U.S. Department of Transportation, DOT, oversight of how these taxpayer dollars are spent. And I appreciate the support of Senators COLLINS and REED for my amendment to give DOT the power to appoint and oversee Metro's Federal board members, instead of the General Services Administration.

The bill provides funding for an important Maryland jobs corridor—the Purple Line, which is a new light rail system to be constructed in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. HUD's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control also receives strong funding, which is critically important to my hometown of Baltimore. Like many older cities in the Northeast, Baltimore has a significant lead paint problem.

This is a good bill. I urge my colleagues to offer only germane amendments, so we can complete our work before Thanksgiving and keep momentum going to complete a 12-bill omnibus before December 11.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I am pleased to report that the ranking member and I have two amendments that have been cleared by both sides.

Mr. President, it appears that I am premature by a couple of moments, so I will suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I wish to speak for 5 minutes on Epilepsy Awareness Month. If the matter for which Senator WICKER is waiting comes to the floor, I will interrupt my speech immediately so I don't slow down his business at all. I know he has been waiting here for a while, but as long as we were in a quorum call, I will speak in recognition of November as Epilepsy Awareness Month.

Epilepsy is a chronic, debilitating condition that can produce violent, unpredictable seizures. It can be caused by traumatic events such as strokes, tumors, or brain injuries, but for a lot of patients the cause remains unknown. It is no easy thing to live with epilepsy. Yet millions of Americans do so every day, including an estimated 10,000 Rhode Islanders. They include Sawyer, a 12-year-old Warwick resident who recently started seventh grade. I think we all remember what it was like to be a young person in school. I am sure we all know someone who for one reason or another was labeled as different and had a harder time than most. Well, imagine how hard it must be to navigate that world while also struggling with the daily symptoms of epilepsy. It takes a brave person to confront that challenge head-on, and I think we can all admire Sawyer's courage every day as he goes to school and pursues his education amid challenging circumstances.

One reason Sawyer and his mom moved to Rhode Island was to take advantage of the support services provided by the Matty Fund, a local organization dedicated to helping those living with epilepsy and raising awareness of the condition. The organization was founded in 2003 by Richard and Deb Siravo in honor of their son Matty, whom they lost to epilepsy that same year. The group provides services to local families, including Camp Matty, a day camp designed for kids with epilepsy.

Sawyer recently attended Camp Matty and spent time with other kids like him, as well as older camp counselors, who are living with epilepsy and thriving. According to the Matty Fund, Sawyer flourished during his time at the camp. The group's executive director, Marisol Garcies, tells me that Sawyer "could see in these teenagers and volunteers a glimpse of himself in a few short years, and it comforted him."

I am proud of the work the Matty Fund is doing to support Rhode Island kids like Sawyer, and I would also like to see us in Congress do more to give hope to him and millions of other Americans living with epilepsy.

Federal funding for epilepsy research through the National Institutes of Health was cut \$27 million from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2013 as a result of the recent budget battles. Funding has been restored in the years since, but until we provide the kind of year-to-year funding certainty that big research initiatives need, there will continue to be trouble.

The researchers developing the next generation of medical treatments for epilepsy and countless other conditions shouldn't have to worry that their funding is at risk because Congress is having another political fight. That is why I am proud to be a cosponsor of Senator DURBIN's American Cures Act, which would create a trust fund dedicated to sustaining and expanding

funding for health research at the NIH, CDC, Department of Defense, and Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, I am currently working with my colleagues on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to make NIH funding a mandatory part of our annual budget, ensuring that a baseline of Federal research dollars will be available year in and year out. I hope we can get it done.

In the meantime, let's all keep sending our thoughts and prayers to people like Sawyer, and to help to lift the stigma that is too often associated with epilepsy. These brave individuals fight every day to live a normal life against some very real obstacles, and we can help by giving them our admiration and encouragement.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, the ranking member and I have two amendments that have been cleared by both sides.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 2809 AND 2817 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2812

I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up and agreed to en bloc: Senator MCCAIN's amendment No. 2809 and Senator MIKULSKI's amendment No. 2817.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the amendments en bloc by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine [Ms. COLLINS], for Mr. MCCAIN, proposes an amendment numbered 2809 to amendment No. 2812.

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED], for Ms. MIKULSKI, proposes an amendment numbered 2817 to amendment No. 2812.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 2809

(Purpose: To require the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration to review certain decisions to grant categorical exclusions for Next Generation flight procedures and to consult with the airports at which such procedures will be implemented)

After section 119C, insert the following:

SEC. 119D. Section 213(c) of the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-95; 49 U.S.C. 40101 note) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(3) NOTIFICATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS.—Not less than 90 days before applying a categorical exclusion under this subsection to a new procedure at an OEP airport, the Administrator shall—

"(A) notify and consult with the operator of the airport at which the procedure would be implemented; and

"(B) consider consultations or other engagement with the community in the which the airport is located to inform the public of the procedure.

"(4) REVIEW OF CERTAIN CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall review a decision of the Administrator made on or after February 14, 2012, and before the date of the enactment of this paragraph to grant a categorical exclusion under this subsection with respect to a procedure to be implemented at an OEP airport that was a ma-

terial change from procedures previously in effect at the airport to determine if the implementation of the procedure had a significant effect on the human environment in the community in which the airport is located if the operator of that airport requests such a review and demonstrates that there is good cause to believe that the implementation of the procedure had such an effect.

"(B) CONTENT OF REVIEW.—If, in conducting a review under subparagraph (A) with respect to a procedure implemented at an OEP airport, the Administrator, in consultation with the operator of the airport, determines that implementing the procedure had a significant effect on the human environment in the community in which the airport is located, the Administrator shall—

"(i) consult with the operator of the airport to identify measures to mitigate the effect of the procedure on the human environment; and

"(ii) in conducting such consultations, consider the use of alternative flight paths.

"(C) HUMAN ENVIRONMENT DEFINED.—In this paragraph, the term 'human environment' has the meaning given that term in section 1508.14 of title 40, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on the day before the date of the enactment of this paragraph)."

AMENDMENT NO. 2817

(Purpose: To provide that the Secretary of Transportation shall have sole authority to appoint Federal Directors to the Board of Directors of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. (a) In this section—

(1) the term "Compact" means the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Compact (Public Law 89-774; 80 Stat 1324);

(2) the term "Federal Director" means—

(A) a voting member of the Board of Directors of the Transit Authority who represents the Federal Government; and

(B) a nonvoting member of the Board of Directors of the Transit Authority who serves as an alternate for a member described in subparagraph (A); and

(3) the term "Transit Authority" means the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority established under Article III of the Compact.

(b)(1) Notwithstanding section 601(d)(3) of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (division B of Public Law 110-432; 122 Stat. 4969) and section 1(b)(1) of Public Law 111-62 (123 Stat. 1998), hereafter the Secretary of Transportation shall have sole authority to appoint Federal Directors to the Board of Directors of the Transit Authority.

(2) The signatory parties to the Compact shall amend the Compact as necessary in accordance with paragraph (1).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the amendments (Nos. 2809 and 2817) are agreed to.

Ms. COLLINS. I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. President, just a very brief explanation on both of these amendments. Senator MIKULSKI's amendment simply allows the Secretary of Transportation to select the Federal appointees for the Washington metro system. That is done by the head of GSA right now, and obviously GSA is an agency with no transportation policy expertise, so this simply makes sense. It is non-controversial and has already been passed out of the Senate committee of jurisdiction.

Senator MIKULSKI has been very concerned, as have many of us, about the safety and operational issues with Metro, and I believe this amendment is an excellent one, and I am proud to lend my support.

Senator MCCAIN's amendment ensures that the Federal Aviation Administration reviews its procedures when there are complaints from a community about the noise of airplanes that are landing in a particular area and that they do a report.

I think both of these amendments make a great deal of sense, and I am pleased that we were able to clear them and get them adopted.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

AMENDMENT NO. 2815 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2812

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 2815.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Mississippi [Mr. WICKER] proposes an amendment numbered 2815 to amendment No. 2812.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To authorize the Secretary of Transportation to increase the minimum length limitation for a truck tractor-semitrailer-trailer combination from 28 to 33 feet if such change would not negatively impact public safety)

Beginning on page 45, strike line 16 and all that follows through line a on page 46 and insert the following:

SEC. 137. The Secretary of Transportation may promulgate a rulemaking to increase the minimum length limitation that a State may prescribe for a truck tractor-semitrailer-trailer combination under section 3111(b)(1)(A) of title 49, United States Code, from 28 feet to 33 feet if the Secretary makes a statistically significant finding, based on the final Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study required under section 32801 of the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Enhancement Act of 2012 (title II of division C of Public Law 112-141), that such change would not have a net negative impact on public safety.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I thank the chair and ranking member of the committee and, of course, the staff for working with us on this issue. This is an amendment that should be familiar to Members because essentially the same language was voted on in the form of a motion to instruct conferees last week. The essence of both that motion, which was adopted on a vote of 56 to 31, and this amendment today is to prevent a Federal mandate which has been contained in the committee version of this bill. That mandate would have required all 50 States to allow twin 33 tandem tractor-trailer rigs in each State. Some 12 States allow these twin 33 tandem tractor-

trailer trucks and some 38 States prevent them. If the language were to remain in the appropriations bill, all 50 States, including the 38 States that have chosen not to accept these trucks, would be mandated.

I think the vote of the Senate was clear last week. I will simply point out that this will remove a Federal mandate and will assist small business truckers who don't have the capital to move to these new longer double trucks. It will promote public safety and, I would submit, save lives and save \$1.2 to \$1.8 billion every year in maintenance and repair because of the damage caused by these twin 33 trailers.

I appreciate the committee working with me to get a vote, and at this point I ask that the amendment be adopted.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, we are now prepared to have a voice vote on Senator WICKER's amendment; therefore, I know of no further debate on the Wicker amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2815) was agreed to.

Ms. COLLINS. I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. President, I am pleased that we are making progress, and I encourage other Members to come to the floor and share their proposals with us so we can continue to dispense with amendments.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISIS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, yesterday I spoke about the horrific terror attacks in Paris last week and why they were a stark reminder of two things: first, that the threat of ISIS stretches well beyond Syria and Iraq, and, second, that this terror army has grown in power. It has grown in influence and certainly has grown in territory.

Unfortunately, the administration and the Commander in Chief, in particular, have effectively stood by as spectators without developing an effective strategy to degrade and destroy ISIS as the President claims is his goal. Instead, we have seen airstrikes, which are necessary but not sufficient to deal with the threat of ISIS in Syria and in Iraq.

So more than a year ago, I, among others, called on the President to discuss with the Congress his strategy. My thought is that anytime Americans are sent into harm's way—and there

are Americans in harm's way both in Iraq and perhaps throughout the region—there ought to be a clear purpose articulated by the Commander in Chief. It ought to be a joint undertaking between the Congress and the Executive because our men and women in uniform deserve the unqualified support of all Americans, and I think that can best be demonstrated and accomplished by building consensus for this action in Congress.

But what we have seen instead are speeches, interviews, and assurances that have really attempted to hide the fact that the President's so-called strategy against ISIS has been nothing more and nothing less than an abject failure. The picture painted by the administration on the perceived success of this strategy has been overstated at best and disingenuous at worst. Between referring to ISIS, now numbering as many as 30,000 strong, as the "JV team" and just hours before the Paris attacks proclaiming in an interview with ABC that they were "contained," the President has simply not shot straight with the American people.

The American people can take the truth; they just haven't heard it yet about the nature of the threat and about an effective strategy to deal with that threat. As we have learned and as the 9/11 Commission observed, one of the worst things we could do for our own national security is allow safe havens for terrorists to develop in places such as Syria and Iraq, places where they can train, arm, and then they can export their attacks, and given the unique capability of ISIS, they can communicate by social media and over the Internet and radicalize people here in the United States, just as they apparently did with people in France.

Criticism of the President's lack of a strategy is not a partisan issue. It is not limited to members of my political party. On Monday, in an interview on MSNBC, the ranking member on the Senate Intelligence Committee, the senior Senator from California, said: "ISIL is not contained," adding, "I have never been more concerned." That is Senator FEINSTEIN the ranking member—I believe they call them vice chair—of the Intelligence Committee. I couldn't agree with my Democratic colleague from California more. ISIL, ISIS, Daesh—whatever you want to call it—has not been contained. I agree with her. I have never been more concerned about a terrorist threat, particularly since 9/11.

It is very clear that in the wake of the tragic events in Paris, what the administration is doing to combat ISIS is failing. It is not working. In Iraq, ISIS has captured city after city over the last 2 years where Americans have shed their blood, where Americans spent their treasure and took years to bring relative peace preceding President Obama's precipitous withdrawal from Iraq.

I can only imagine how hard it is for some of our veterans who served in

Iraq to hear the laundry list of familiar places that have been taken by ISIS almost overnight. Sadly, of course, this includes cities where the precious lives of American heroes were lost, places such as Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi. I can only imagine what an American veteran, having lost a limb or suffered other grievous injury, must feel, the rage they must have after seeing those hard-fought gains squandered. And I can't help but think of the Gold Star Mothers, moms who have lost service men and women in combat and in service to our country. What a terrible squandering of hard-fought-for gains. But that is what laid the predicate and created the vacuum for the threat we see today.

From where we stand today, Iraq is undeniably worse than when President Obama took office. He said he wanted to end the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, only to see, because of bad judgment and bad strategy, the war proliferate and get that much more serious—at least the war being conducted against us, our American interests, and our allies. As I said, the result of that bad policy and bad judgment is not one less war, it is a safe haven for ISIS that has been carved out of Syria and Iraq. The border between those two previously separated countries has been completely erased, as 30,000 fighters continue to plunge the region deeper into chaos.

I was struck by the comments of the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, who spoke at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday. He said that before the current administration, there were probably about 700 adherents left. That is the origin of this problem today which is known as Al Qaeda—700 or so adherents left. And as I have already alluded to, according to news reports, there are between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters across Iraq and Syria. Those are the numbers of troops ISIS can now muster as a result of our failed policies in Iraq and Syria. So according to the CIA Director's own estimate, that means there has been an increase, just during the seven years of the Obama administration, of between 2,700 and 4,400 percent.

Mr. President, your strategy is not working.

As we all know, this is not just about a fight over there; this is about a fight that is coming here, to a neighborhood, to a city near you. According to the media reports on Monday, the CIA Director also warned that ISIS was likely planning additional attacks. On that same day, a new propaganda video popped up online in which ISIS issued a fresh threat to target Washington, DC.

Perhaps most concerning—and it is all concerning—is a serious threat we face at home from a jihadist who is already living here on U.S. soil. Most of the people who carried out the attacks in France were born and grew up in Belgium. Some of them immigrated, one under a fake Syrian passport, apparently. But we need to be concerned

about homegrown radicalized terrorists, radicalized by ISIS or like-minded groups via the Internet. In Texas, we have seen this firsthand—the so-called homegrown threats that occurred at Fort Hood in 2009 and in Garland, TX, earlier this year.

But in the face of all of this—the President's own CIA Director talking about the huge increase in the threat over the last 7 years of this failed strategy—and given what has happened in Paris, given the threat against the United States and Washington, DC, in this propaganda video, why in the world would any reasonable person say “We don't need to change a thing; we need to stay the course”—which is apparently what the President is saying. No rational person would say “Hey, this is working out just the way I had it planned.” You would reconsider and you would reevaluate in light of the evidence and the experience. That is what a reasonable person would do.

Well, the Washington Post, on November 16—I guess that was 2 days ago—issued an editorial called “President Obama's false choice against the Islamic State.” In the first paragraph, they used a word to describe the President that I thought I understood the meaning of and I think I did, but I looked it up anyway. It is the word “petulant.” This is what they said:

Pressed about his strategy for fighting the Islamic State, a petulant-sounding President Obama insisted Monday, as he has before, that his critics have offered no concrete alternatives for action in Syria and Iraq, other than “putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground.”

Well, “petulant”—I did look it up. “Childishly sulky or bad-tempered” is one definition. So apparently the Washington Post wasn't impressed with the President's response either.

They went on to say that the President's claim was faulty in a number of respects. First, nobody has proposed putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground—no one. So this is a straw man the President erects just so he can knock it down to try to discredit anybody who doesn't drink the same Kool-Aid he does on this topic.

The Washington Post went on to say that a number of military experts have proposed a number of constructive ideas that would help us make better progress against this enemy, things such as deploying more Special Operations forces, including forward air controllers who can direct munitions, airstrikes, and bombing raids with much more accuracy than without them.

We could also make sure that we have more Americans to advise the Iraqis' moderate Syrian forces and other people with similar interests on battlefield tactics to make them more effective. The President could send in more advisers to Iraqi battalions and more U.S. specialized assets. There is no one in the world who has a technological advantage on the United States when it comes to our military and our

specialized assets, such as drones, for example, among other things.

Then there is the issue of the Kurds. The Peshmerga have been an impressive fighting force. They have been boots-on-the-ground in a large portion of Iraq, and they have been crying out for the sorts of weapons that they need in order to be more effective. The administration has decided: Well, let's send everything through Baghdad. Sadly, most of those weapons don't end up making their way into the hands of the Kurds and the Peshmerga because of political differences between them.

So there is a lot we could do, and the President's straw man that he continually erects so he can just knock it down as he tries to ridicule and criticize anybody who has the temerity to question this failed strategy—it is just not working. It is not working for him, and people increasingly are losing confidence in his judgment.

To eradicate ISIS abroad and neutralize the threat this terror army poses at home, we need a proactive, multifaceted strategy. The President's approach, characterized by ineffectual airstrikes and half measures, has resulted in a tactical stalemate that has kept ISIS's morale high and recruitment steady.

We are blessed with some of the most elite military forces in the world, incredible human beings and great patriots. But not even they can hold on to territory after it is bombed because there simply are not enough of them. That is why, as the Washington Post suggested, it is so important to send in American advisers on tactics and people who will allow the boots on the ground, such as the Kurds, the Peshmerga, to be more effective. They can be the boots on the ground. They are the ones with the most direct interest in the outcome.

It doesn't take an expert military strategist to see that airpower alone will not defeat ISIS. Perhaps the greatest military leader we have had, and certainly in my adult lifetime, GEN David Petraeus, has said that. The President's own military advisers have told him that, but he simply won't listen to them—preferring, it seems to me, to sort of run out the clock on his administration and then have to hand off this terrible mess to his successor. But Heaven help us if in the meantime, as a result of this ineffective strategy and an emboldened ISIS, we see more attacks not over there but over here.

We already have U.S. boots on the ground in Iraq and Syria. I would just remind everyone that there are about 3,500 U.S. troops in Iraq and about 50 U.S. special operators in Syria, as the Obama administration has publicly stated. So if the President is going to put American boots on the ground, why not come up with a strategy, working together with our allies and those with aligned interests, to make them more effective and actually crush ISIS before ISIS hits us here in the homeland?

We know the White House has sought to micromanage the military campaign

and impose unreasonable restrictions on what the troops who are there are allowed to do—so-called caveats. Our warfighters literally have had one arm tied behind their back. This is simply just another recipe for continued failure, and it has to stop, it has to change.

We know that ISIS cannot be dislodged from territory it now holds unless we have effective partners on the ground. That means working closely, as I indicated, with partners such as Iraqi security forces, the Kurdish Peshmerga, the Sunni tribal forces, and supporting them with U.S. airpower and intelligence. To further bolster these ground partners, the President needs to consider embedding American troops as military advisers, as I just said. By employing U.S. troops as joint tactical air controllers, as I mentioned earlier from the Washington Post editorial—that was one of their suggestions—in support of those ground partners, we would make our airstrikes more precise and more lethal.

This is the type of thing that will be needed to clear and to hold territory after recapturing it from ISIS. It doesn't accomplish very much to bomb the living daylight out of some ISIS stronghold and not follow on with troops to hold that territory. We end up doing the same thing over and over again—bombing the same territory, they leave, and then they come back—because there is nothing there to hold that territory.

In the long run, the overall effort to dislodge ISIS from key tribal areas and population centers has to be undergirded by a political framework as well that will sustain the lasting rejection of ISIS's bankrupt ideology. No one is suggesting that military combat alone is going to solve this problem, but in order to bring the people who can—the so-called reconcilables, the people who are willing to try and work toward a long-lasting solution and eradicate the ones who will not—it will take a military strategy and a political framework.

I will just close on this. There has been a lot of concern about refugees. I have heard it in my office and we have all heard it from our constituents back home. Whose heart doesn't break for people who have been run out of their own homeland, who have seen family members murdered by a butcher like Assad in Syria? But this is not a new phenomenon. We have known since the Syrian civil war started, following the Arab Spring in 2011, that hundreds of thousands, indeed millions of Syrians have fled their country, have been dislocated within the country, have moved into refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan, in Lebanon, and now they are going to Europe and some of them are showing up here in the United States.

I would bet, if you ask every single one of them or most of the refugees, would you prefer to live in safety and

security in your own land or do you want to go somewhere else, they would say: I want to stay here. So we need a policy that will actually allow Syrians to stay in Syria and Iraqis to stay in Iraq, but in the absence of any kind of military strategy, no political framework, and no solution from the Commander in Chief, these poor people have nowhere else to go. So we need to create safe zones in Syria.

We can do that. We can create a no-fly zone in cooperation with our partners there in the Middle East. We need to create safe zones in Syria, where tens of thousands of refugees who are now trying to flee Syria could actually live, with our help. This means areas where innocent men, women, and children can be protected from attacks both from the air and from the ground, zones where they don't have to worry about being murdered 24 hours a day by ISIS or by the bloodthirsty regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Congress should not have to tell the Commander in Chief how to conduct a successful military campaign or what a strategy looks like. But you know what. It takes the Washington Post editorial to tell the President that what he is saying is the alternative is just not true and that there are constructive ways we can turn the tide against ISIS and provide more stability and safety to people who prefer to stay home and not flee to distant shores and create consternation here in the United States about whether we are adequately screening these refugees to make sure they are not a threat to us here.

It is my hope the President will consider thoughtful options that are being proposed by Members of Congress. I will bet there are thoughtful options being proposed by the President's own military advisers, but he is just simply not listening to them and stubbornly resisting reconsidering his failed strategy—petulant is what the Washington Post called it. Childishly sulky or bad temper, that is what they called the President's attitude.

The American people have seen some of their own countrymen and countrywomen murdered by ISIS in barbaric and horrific fashion in images transmitted around the globe. They are understandably apprehensive about our security as a nation and our receding leadership role in the world. What is basically happening is, as America retreats, the tyrants, the thugs, the terrorists, the bullies fill that void. In this case, just like before 9/11, that void is filled by bad people who want to not only harm the people nearby but the West—meaning the United States and our allies over here.

So the American people deserve a clear, credible strategy from the President, one that will combat this terror threat before the violence we saw last week in Paris shows up here on our own doorstep. More than ever our Nation needs strong leadership, and I hope the President will finally rise to the challenge.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT). The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NIH RESEARCH

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, as my colleagues know, we are in the process of discussing an appropriations bill—called an omnibus bill. For the first time in a long time we have passed an appropriations bill in the Senate. That is progress. We are working on a second one today as well. As we debate the priorities and spending levels for this final appropriations bill for this year, I want to highlight an opportunity we have to deliver on a promise to provide strong support for the National Institutes of Health and for the lifesaving biomedical research that results in that spending.

I would also mention that we have the opportunity to assist in financial support, in providing resources to advance the efforts of a couple of agencies that are greatly allied with NIH; that being the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Defense and its medical research as it finds cures and treatments for our military men and women and the consequences of their service, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What I want to highlight is that if we fulfill a promise in regard to medical and biomedical research, we can position our country to provide steady, predictable growth to NIH, the largest supporter of medical research in the world. This sustained commitment, which has been absent for so long, will benefit our Nation many times over and bring hope to many patients in today's generation and those that follow.

Unfortunately, we have not adequately and we have not always upheld our responsibility in this regard. The purchasing power of the National Institutes of Health has diminished dramatically. If you account for inflation, NIH receives 22 percent less funding than it did in 2003. This has negatively impacted our research capacity.

In the best of times, NIH research proposals were funded one out of three times. So if there were three proposals, one of them was accepted for funding. That ratio has now fallen to one in six, the lowest level in history.

The challenge is ours, and the moment to act is now for our moms, our dads, our family members, our friends, for people we don't even know, and for the fiscal condition of our country. If you care about people, you will be supportive of medical research; and if you care about the fiscal condition of our country, you will be caring about medical research.

I am a member of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations, which is responsible for the funding of NIH and

these other agencies. Earlier this year, under the leadership of my colleague and friend from Missouri, the chairman, Senator BLUNT, my Senate appropriations colleagues and I were successful in significantly boosting NIH's budget in the Senate's fiscal year 2016 appropriations bill. We achieved more than a \$2 billion increase in NIH. This is an amount around \$1.95 billion more than the President's request and more than \$880 million above the number contained in the House's version of this legislation. This \$2 billion increase would be the greatest baseline boost to NIH since 2003. It bothers me when I say it is a boost to NIH because what it is a boost to is not a Federal agency but rather a boost to the results, the consequences of that investment in research.

With the recent 2-year budget deal that became law recently, it presents a path by which we are able to deliver a much needed budget increase to NIH and to prioritize important research that saves and improves lives, reduces health care costs, and fuels economic growth. This boost would be a tremendous step in putting NIH back on a sound path of predictable, sustainable growth, demonstrating to our Nation's best and brightest researchers, medical doctors, scientists, and students that Congress supports their work and will make sure they have the resources needed to carry out their important research.

The time to achieve this objective is now. If the United States is to continue providing leadership in medical breakthroughs, to develop cures and treat disease, we must commit significantly to supporting this effort. If we fail to lead, researchers will not be able to rely upon that consistency, we will jeopardize our current progress, stunt our Nation's competitiveness, and lose a generation of young researchers to other careers or to other countries' research.

Whenever Congress crafts appropriations bills we face a challenge. We all face this issue of balancing our priorities with the concern about making certain our Nation's fiscal course is on a better path than it has been. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to find those programs that are worthy of funding, that actually work, that are effective, that serve the American people and demonstrate a significant return to the taxpayer who actually pays the bill. Congress should set spending priorities and focus our resources on initiatives that have proven outcomes.

No initiative I know meets these criteria better than biomedical research conducted at the National Institutes of Health and our other Federal allied agencies. NIH-supported research has raised life expectancy, improved quality of life, lowered overall health care costs, and is that economic engine our country so desperately needs as we try to compete in a global economy.

Today we are living longer and we are living healthier lives thanks to NIH

research. Deaths from heart disease and stroke have dropped 70 percent in the last half century. U.S. cancer death rates are following about 1 percent each year, but as we know, much work remains. Diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease, stroke, and mental illness touch all of us, touch all of our communities, touch all of our States, and dramatically affect our country.

Half of the men and one-third of all women in the United States will develop cancer in their lifetime. One in three Medicare dollars is spent caring for an individual with diabetes. Nearly one in five Medicare dollars is spent on people with Alzheimer's or other dementias. In 2050, it will be one in every three dollars. In other words, the cost of dementia and Alzheimer's grows dramatically over time.

New scientific findings are what yield the breakthroughs that enable us to confront these staggering financial challenges of these diseases and others. Therefore, in order to advance life-saving medical research for patients around the world, balance our Federal budget, control Medicare and Medicaid spending, let's prioritize biomedical research and lead in science and in discovery.

I appreciate the opportunity, as we work to fashion this final appropriations bill before the deadline of December 11, to work with my colleagues across the Senate to make sure that biomedical research, NIH, and its allied agencies receive the necessary financial support that benefits all Americans today and in the future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GLOBAL SECURITY CRISIS

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about our persistent global security crisis, but I also want to connect how our national debt crisis affects that.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of the victims of these tragic events of the last 3 weeks. This week the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hosted the French Ambassador to the United States. In that meeting we shared that our thoughts and prayers are with them and with the people of France. But, more than that, we stand in solidarity with them against these evil forces that manifested themselves in the streets of Paris this past week. The horrific ISIS attacks in Paris—killing more than 130 and injuring more than 350 men, women, and some children—serve as a chilling reminder of the threat we continue to face from international terrorism every day.

Earlier this week, Russia confirmed that it was indeed a terrorist bomb that took down a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 peo-

ple onboard. Just last night, we saw two aircraft—thank God, under a false alarm—grounded because of fear of a terrorist attack. In addition, ISIS claimed responsibility for twin suicide attacks in Beirut last week, killing 43 more people. This makes three international attacks in three short weeks.

ISIS continues to be a persistent threat to the West and to the security and stability of the Middle East. Unfortunately, as they have already said several times, these attacks only confirm what ISIS has in mind for the future. ISIS has been very clear about their intention to bring their version of terrorism to our own backyard, here in America. Indeed, ISIS even threatened Paris-styled attacks on our Nation's Capital in a recent video this week.

Earlier this week, CIA Director John Brennan said he would not consider the Paris attacks a one-off event. Director Brennan went on to say:

It's clear to me that ISIL has an external agenda, that they are determined to carry out these types of attacks. I would anticipate that this is not the only operation that ISIL has in the pipeline.

In light of the latest attacks by ISIS—beyond Iraq and Syria—I could not disagree more with our President, who says that his policies are indeed containing ISIS. The President and his administration continue to underestimate this threat. He even called them the JV team not too long ago. Despite the fact that ISIS has demonstrated its ability to perpetrate large-scale attacks beyond the borders of its so-called Caliphate, President Obama refuses to change his failed strategy.

Beyond the fault of the President, however, fault lies here in Congress as well. Washington is entirely too often focused on the crisis of the day instead of getting at the true underlying problems and solving them directly. It shouldn't take a tragedy like this for Washington to pay attention. Again, the latest terrorist attacks only underscore that we are facing a global security crisis of increasing magnitude, and this is inextricably linked to our own national debt crisis.

As a matter of fact, the biggest threat to our global security is still our Nation's own Federal debt. This is as true today as it was when Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in 2012, said the same thing.

In the past 6 years, Washington has spent \$21.5 trillion running the Federal Government. That is so large, I have a hard time even grasping how significant that is. But what I can understand is this: Of that \$21.5 trillion we spent running the Federal Government, we have actually borrowed \$8 trillion of that \$21.5 trillion. With over \$100 trillion of future unfunded liabilities, on top of the \$18.5 trillion we have already built up, this is about \$1 million for every household in America. Every family in America today shares in this responsibility of about \$1 million per family.

We are so far past the tipping point, it may be at a point of being unmanageable. If interest rates alone were at their 30-year average of 5.5 percent, we would already be paying over \$1 trillion in interest. That is unmanageable. That is twice what we spend on our defense investment, and it is twice what we spend on our discretionary non-defense investment. It is unmanageable, and we are well past that tipping point.

Yet, Washington's own dysfunction and gridlock is keeping us from completing the budget process, as I speak today, and passing appropriations bills in the Senate. I might even argue, we may have seen the last truly voted-upon and approved appropriations in the Senate because of the abuses of the rules that we have seen both sides play in recent years. Shockingly, in the last 40 years, only 4 times has the budget process worked the way it was designed, as it was written into law in 1974.

For example, this year we have tried to get onto the defense appropriations bill. That means we are trying to take the appropriations bill that would fund the defense so we can defend Americans abroad and we can defend our interests here at home against threats like ISIS, and we are being blocked from even getting that bill—which passed with a vast majority of votes in committee—from getting to the floor for a vote. No less than three times have the people on the other side of the aisle blocked it from going to the floor for debate, amendment process, and a vote; and three times the Democrats have voted against allowing us to get the defense appropriations bill on the floor, thus making it a political football. It is something I don't understand, not being of the political process here. We have recent attacks from ISIS, and yet we can't even find consensus here in this body to fund our Defense Department. William Few, the very first Senator from Georgia, in whose seat I serve today, would absolutely be appalled. He would remind us of the United States Constitution. There are only 6 reasons why 13 colonies, of which Georgia was one, came together to form this miracle called the United States. One of those was to "provide for the common defense." And here we are, through dysfunction and partisan politics, not acting appropriately to fund the ability to provide for the common defense.

I hope we can learn from recent events and get serious about tackling this debt problem so we can use that resource to fund our strong foreign policy. We need a strong foreign policy to fight these threats abroad. But to have a strong foreign policy, we have to have a strong military. We proved that in the 1980s, when we brought down the Soviet Union with the strength of our economy and the power of our ideas. We are at risk today because of our own intransigence and national debt. To have a strong military, as we

proved, we have to have a strong economy. That is in jeopardy because of this growing debt crisis.

To confront this global debt crisis, we have to get serious today. We have to break through. We have to get shoulder to shoulder and defend our country, which means we have to do the hard work on the floor of the Senate and pass the funding so we can defend ourselves against these new threats. Now is the time to solve this debt crisis so we can lead as a country again, to deal with this global security crisis, and to provide for the safety of Americans, wherever they are in the world.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, let me start by congratulating our colleagues on the Environment and Public Works Committee on which I serve, as well as the banking, commerce, and finance committees, where I also serve, on the recent appointment of a House-Senate conference to attempt to produce a final product for a multiyear transportation plan for our country.

I am a strong supporter, as are many of my colleagues, of investments in our Nation's roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems. I have been so for 15 years as a Senator, for 8 years before that as a Governor, and for years before that as someone who focused an economic development and job creation within the State of Delaware.

I am pleased on one hand that after too many years of short-term extensions in transportation funding, we are set to make rebuilding and modernizing our country's transportation system a long-term national priority again, and God knows we need to. However, I regret that I still have deep concerns for how Congress has decided to pay for these investments. For decades we have paid for our transportation systems—roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems—through the use of user fees in the form of Federal excise taxes and, in some cases, on gasoline and diesel fuel to support the funding of our Nation's transportation system for over a half century—over 50 years. I believe that approach remains the fairest and most efficient way to fund transportation projects. However, since 2008, we have strayed from a user-pays approach. Instead, we rely on \$75 billion worth of budget gimmicks, unrelated offsets, and debt to prop up our transportation trust fund to pay for transportation investments. Rather than right our course, both the House and Senate transportation proposals

rely on tens of billions of dollars in additional budget gimmicks and unrelated offsets to fund this bill over the next 6 years. That is not the right way to pay for our infrastructure. I think it is the wrong way. It is not unfair, in my view, to ask the businesses and people who use our roads, highways, and bridges to help pay for them. We have done that for 50 years, we know how to do it, it is a reasonably simple system, and I think it is a fair system. We can adjust the earned-income tax credit in order to offset any increase in the user-fee cost that would have an impact on lower income families because this kind of increase in the tax could be seen as not progressive. Having said that, that is not what we are going to do, and what we are going to do instead is do what we have done for the last 7 years and use gimmicks and things that have nothing to do with transportation to ostensibly pay for transportation funding.

All that being said, this is a course that Congress has voted for, and despite my misgivings over the funding, there is still much to commend in both the House and Senate legislation, particularly on the authorization side that comes out of the Environment and Public Works Committee and out of the Transportation Infrastructure Committee in the House.

Among the areas that I believe should be supported and should certainly be preserved in Congress is a robustly funded freight program, competitive grants for major projects, funding to reduce dangerous diesel pollution, and research grants to explore alternatives to user fees—the gas and diesel tax. I hope these provisions are retained in whatever bill emerges from the conference committee. Other provisions, such as caps on investment of freight funding in rail, port, and water transportation projects and cuts to public transit funding in Northeastern States should also be dropped.

Finally, Congress will face the question of how to balance the benefits of long-term investment predictability with the urgent project investment needs around our country. While the long-term predictability is certainly important, we must consider the significant unmet investment needs around our country and the huge economic benefits that transportation investments offer to America's businesses and families.

This legislation would best serve our country by maximizing annual investment levels for all service transportation programs over a shorter authorization period, and instead of having an inadequate amount of money to go to pay for transportation improvements over 6 years, I would hope our conferees would consider maybe using that same amount of money and just spread it over 5 years or even 4 years. We could use every dime of it, and then some, for the transportation needs of our country.

This may be the last talk I give on the Senate floor. I have given a bunch

of speeches on transportation, not so much on the authorization side of it, but mostly about finding a way to pay for it. Writing the transportation authorization legislation—while not easy—is the easy part of the job. The hard part is figuring out how to pay for stuff. For a long time we have used a user-fee approach, such as the gas and diesel tax. We have done that since Dwight Eisenhower was President and when we were building the Interstate Highway System.

We last raised the gas and diesel taxes in 1993, so it has been 22 years. The gas tax today is 18 cents, and after inflation it is worth about a dime. The diesel tax was raised about 22 years ago and is about 23 cents, and today it is worth less than 15 cents.

A couple of days ago, I bought gasoline in Dover, and I think we paid just a tad over \$2 a gallon. Last week I was told there are 30,000 gas stations across America where people filled up and paid less than \$2 a gallon for gasoline.

Senator DURBIN, Senator FEINSTEIN, and I in the Senate, and others in the House, have offered legislation to restore the purchasing power of the gas and diesel tax. We are not looking to increase it by 25 cents, 50 cents or \$1, as some have suggested, but to simply raise it 4 cents a year for 4 years, and at the end of 4 years in 2020, index it to the rate of inflation. If we did that, we would generate something like \$220 billion that would be used for our roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems over the next 10 years.

Instead, we are not going to do that. We are going to take money from the increase in TSA fees, which ostensibly was to be used to protect people when they fly on airplanes, and instead we will use it for roads, highways, and bridges. We are taking the money that should go to bolster the strength of our borders so we can make sure we are able to detect drugs and other things that shouldn't be going across our borders—particularly the border crossings where we have huge amounts of commerce moving in and out of our country into Mexico or into Canada—and instead we are going to take that money and ostensibly put it in roads, highways, and bridges.

I found a new way to avoid paying for roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems, and it is kind of a novel way, by saying to the Federal Reserve that we are going to reduce their reserves by \$60 billion. The Federal Reserve, or central bank, turns out to have a large portfolio of investments, and a lot of the investments they have are actually Treasury security. During the course of the year, the Federal Reserve, from all of their investments, earns a lot of money, and after they deduct their expenses from all the money they earned—through the interest income that they earn—they turn what is left over to Treasury. They actually remit money during the course of the year—not all at once but during the course of the year.

Last year, the Federal Reserve remitted something like a one-half trillion dollars in net interest and income to the Treasury. That is revenue that enables the Treasury to reduce our deficit. The House came up with the idea of just reaching in and taking \$60 billion out of the Federal Reserve and use that for roads, highways, and bridges instead of it being taken and turned over in due course to the Treasury to reduce the deficit.

Some people ask: What is wrong with doing this for transportation? What is wrong with doing this for homeland security? What is wrong with doing this for defense? What is wrong with doing this for agriculture or doing it for anything? I think this sets a terrible precedent and invites future Congresses to do the same thing. Instead of adhering to a policy that has served us well for many years and having those who use our roads, highways, and bridges pay for them, we are resorting to gimmicks and the kind of things we should not deign to do.

Having said that, there is a good deal to like, especially in the authorization language. I applaud those who have worked on this legislation, and I appreciate the chance to help shape and reform some of it, but I wish we had taken a different course with respect to actually paying for this work that needs to be done.

The last thing I will say is this: Our friends at McKinsey consulting firm, an international consulting firm, have an arm of McKinsey consulting called Global Institute. That arm of McKinsey reached out a year or so ago, and they tried to figure out if we were to invest robustly in our roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems, what kind of effect it would have on the unemployment in this country. What kind of effect it would have on the gross domestic product in this country. If we were to truly make the kind of robust investments that are needed—not just the limp-along-level funding, which is woefully inadequate—they calculated that we would add 1.8 million jobs in America.

A lot of the long-term unemployed folks wish they could be hired back again to do construction projects and build roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems. Instead, they are sitting on the sidelines because we don't have the money to pay to hire them to build these projects.

The Global Institute of McKinsey also tells us that robust transportation investments would enable us to grow GDP annually by 1.5 percent. Think about that. We are lucky if we can get GDP up 3 percent per year in this country and so are most developed nations. Simply by making robust investments in our transportation systems—rebuilding America's transportation systems again—we could expect to grow GDP by as much as 1.5 percent per year. The level of funding that is in the legislation before us doesn't come even close to that. I think we missed an opportunity here.

At one of my hearings today, Patty, one of our witnesses, had a funny quote by Yogi Berra, who died earlier this year. She said one of my favorite Yogi Berra quotes: "When you come to the fork in the road, take it." We have come to the fork in the road with respect to transportation funding, and with apologies to Yogi Berra, I think we have taken the wrong fork in that road.

With that, I will call it a day and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISIL

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, the attacks in Paris were an unconscionable act of terrorism. America stands with the people of France and people of Paris, as we support those grieving and those working to deliver justice to the people involved. Make no mistake; the heinous terrorist attacks in Paris were an act of war. ISIL has barbarically killed and tortured innocent civilians, including Americans, not just in Paris but also recently in Beirut and routinely in Iraq. They operate around the globe, are well funded, well armed, and have no intention of stopping until their radical goals are realized. They continue to prey upon the innocent and manipulate the vulnerable. In some areas ISIL operates freely because of the instability created by persistent ethnic, sectarian, and religious conflicts in Iraq and Syria. But this crisis is not limited to Iraq and Syria, and the world's powers and their interests are quickly aligning in the urgent need to wipe the map clean of ISIL and its affiliates.

To be clear, there are smart ways that we can destroy this barbaric terrorist organization without entangling American troops in another endless and bloody ground war in the Middle East. America has a critical role to play in that effort, but it must be part of a larger strategy and coalition, employing a full range of military might, as well as economic and diplomatic power.

We can further engage in this fight in the following ways. First, we must relentlessly target ISIL headquarters in Raqqa and Mosul through air power and destroy ISIL's large oil infrastructure and refineries. Second, we must strangle the flow of foreign fighters on Syria's northern border. Third, we must compel Russia and other governments to reach a political end to the Syrian civil war so that we can unify and focus on fighting the Islamic State. Fourth, we need new measures to crack down on those who finance this terrorism and this extremism. Finally, it is time to drive a much harder bargain with an Iraqi leadership that

still refuses to build a state that is politically inclusive and decentralized.

Defeating ISIL cannot be solely an American solution nor should American ground troops be on the frontlines. It is past time that our Arab allies began focusing their efforts, with our support, on ISIL, militarily and economically. Ultimately, local Arab ground forces are the only lasting solution to defeating ISIL because they will be the ones left to ensure peace and stability once the more immediate military operations are concluded.

Some say that we should deploy 10,000 American troops to Syria. However, we know that this strategy would require significantly more troops and would not permanently eliminate ISIL or kill their ideology. Instead, doing so may well exacerbate the conflict and further ISIL's recruitment efforts. We can say this because we have a historical reference, and that historical reference is not from some distant land or from another century.

For nearly a decade, our brave men and women in uniform were deployed in Iraq and were asked to clear and hold multiple large cities. At the peak, in 2007, nearly 170,000 Americans were deployed on the ground, providing security in communities all across Iraq. Nearly 4,500–4,494 to be exact—gave their lives. More than 32,000 were wounded.

These tragic losses happened in the very same area where ISIL now occupies a major city in Iraq, Mosul, and a major city in Syria across the border, Raqqa. The point of my bringing up the Iraq war is not to relitigate the past but to keep in mind a very important lesson—that even when deploying nearly 200,000 American men and women to stabilize one country, the strategy of clearing and holding large territory is only a bandaid. It is not the permanent solution.

This is especially true when the political leadership in these countries is unwilling to create an inclusive representative government. The calls for sending 10,000 American troops to fight ISIL and to provide security both in Iraq and Syria would mean asking our sons and daughters to remain in these countries fighting year after year for decades into the future.

We know that when American forces are placed in the heart of these regional conflicts, it will only further delay the more lasting solution of having local partners on the ground and our allies in the Persian Gulf taking responsibility for this region, economically and militarily.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Lastly, I wish to talk a little bit about the issue of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Every single Syrian refugee must be subject to the highest levels of vetting and scrutiny, including repeated biometric screenings, before ever entering the United States of America. Syria is a war zone, and we have a duty to ensure that our own homeland security is intact.

The real priority, however, should be addressing the real security gaps that currently exist under the Visa Waiver Program—something on which Democrats and Republicans agree. Currently the Visa Waiver Program allows citizens of countries that qualify—38 countries, including 31 from Europe—to travel freely and stay in the United States for up to 90 days. Individuals who have purposefully traveled to Iraq or Syria, who have joined training camps or sympathized with ISIL's cause—that is where the real risk to the homeland lies.

The victims who have suffered at the hands of ISIL are not the problem, and we should instead be working to close the loopholes that allow dangerous individuals with violent intentions to potentially enter our country today.

In the coming days, I will be calling for reforms to our Visa Waiver Program so that we can focus on the real threats to our homeland. There is a difference between terrorists and victims of terrorism. The implicit assumption that Syrian refugees—many of whom have suffered brutally at the hands of ISIL—are a threat because of their country of origin is a rejection of American values and represents giving into our worst ethnic and religious prejudices.

I am grateful that when my own father and my grandparents fled Germany in the years leading up to World War II, this country chose to see them for what they were—enthusiastic American immigrants seeking to escape the dangerous politics gripping their former nation. Had this brand of twisted anti-immigrant logic been applied to them, I can only wonder how very different my life would be today.

Let's remember that the enemy in this current scenario is ISIL, not the refugees who flee from their destruction. We simply will not have the moral standing as a nation to lead this international scenario if we ignore those who have lost everything at the hands of these barbaric terrorists.

ISIL has killed and tortured many innocent civilians and is actively plotting to do more harm. We should all agree that ISIL must be eliminated from this Earth, but let's learn from our past mistakes and set to this work in a way that is both strategic and effective.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TERRORIST ATTACKS AGAINST FRANCE

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise today with a heavy heart to express my condolences to the people of France for the tragedy they have experienced. No words can describe the barbaric and senseless acts of terrorism committed against the innocent victims in Paris, people who are simply going about

their lives, people who are just enjoying a meal with their family or attending a concert with friends. These barbaric acts were an affront to the people of France and to all humanity.

This is a time for solidarity with France and with all victims of terrorism. The world has rightly come together to condemn these barbaric acts. Now we have to work together and redouble our efforts to defeat ISIS and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq and elsewhere.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

As we remember the victims of the attacks in Paris, we cannot forget all those who are fleeing the terror in Syria. The ongoing conflict in that country has created 4 million refugees. These are people who are fleeing Assad's barrel bombs, his brutal assault on them on the ground, and they are fleeing murderous terrorist attacks committed by ISIS and other groups. Of those 4 million refugees, 1.9 million are in Turkey; 650,000 are in Jordan, a country of 6.5 million people; and 1.2 million are in Lebanon, making up a fifth of Lebanon's entire population.

The White House has a very modest plan to bring 10,000 Syrian refugees into the United States over the next year. It is a tiny number compared to what other countries are doing. Even France—the country that just suffered the terrorist attacks—is going to honor its commitment to take 30,000 refugees over the next 2 years. Each one of the 10,000 refugees we are accepting is important because it could be the difference between life and death for those individuals. That is why I was proud to join Senator DURBIN and other Members to urge the White House to do more—because we can and we should do more.

The United States has always been a refuge for the vulnerable, for those who are fleeing political repression or those who are persecuted simply because of their religion. The Syrian refugees the administration is prioritizing for entry are, in fact, the most vulnerable. These are survivors of violence and torture, people with medical conditions, and women and children.

The news site BuzzFeed has published a series of images of children, of young Syrian refugees. I encourage everyone to look at these images because they capture the vulnerability and desperation of the people we are trying to help, children like Ahmed, who is sleeping in this picture I have in the Chamber. As the BuzzFeed story says, Ahmed is a 6-year-old who carries his own bag over the long stretches his family walks by foot. His uncle says: "He is brave and only cries sometimes in the evenings." His uncle has taken care of Ahmed since his father was killed in their hometown in northern Syria.

There are children like Maram. Maram is an 8-year-old, and the story describes how her house was hit by a rocket. A piece of the roof landed right on top of her, and the head trauma

caused her brain hemorrhage. She is no longer in a coma but has a broken jaw and cannot speak.

We can only hope these children won't share the fate of Aylan Kurdi, whose image I can't get out of my mind. He is the drowned 3-year-old boy whose photograph on that beach galvanized the world. He was part of a group of 23 who had set out in two boats to reach the Greek island of Kos, but the vessels capsized. Aylan drowned, as did his 5-year-old brother Galip, and so did the boys' mother, Rehan.

In the aftermath of the gruesome terrorist attacks in Paris, some have taken the view that we should turn our backs on these people, the very people who are fleeing from the terrorists. Some argue that we cannot both help these vulnerable men, women, and children and keep our country safe, but they paint a false choice. We can do both and we should do both.

I wish to take just a minute to describe the stringent and very extensive security screening procedures these individuals go through before they can even enter the country, procedures so extensive that it can take up to 2 years—usually between 1½ years and 2 years—for them to be cleared to come here.

These refugees are subject to the highest levels of security checks of any category of traveler entering the country. Those screenings include the involvement of our security and intelligence agencies, such as the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense.

All available biographic and biometric information of these refugees is vetted against law enforcement and intelligence community databases so that the identity of the individual can be confirmed. Every single refugee is interviewed by a trained official from the Department of Homeland Security.

Finally, the screening process accounts for the unique conditions of the Syria crisis and subjects these refugees to additional security screening measures.

We absolutely need to make sure these security measures are as stringent and as thorough as possible, and if there are ways to enhance these screening protocols, we should make sure we are doing that.

Each year the United States accepts tens of thousands of refugees from around the world, and there is no reason why some of those can't be Syrian refugees who are the most vulnerable. We can strike the right balance. We can protect our security and do our part to address the largest refugee crisis since World War II. But rather than showing compassion and standing up for American values, many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to close the door to people who are fleeing the most horrendous forms of persecution. I believe that would be-

tray our core values, and it would send a dangerous message to the world that we judge people based on the country they come from or from their religion, and that would make us less safe by feeding into ISIS's own propaganda that we are at war with Islam.

We are better than this. Remember the closing lines of the poem that is inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, the gift from France to the United States that is a symbol of freedom and of generous welcome to foreigners. The poem, "The New Colossus," was written by Emma Lazarus, who was involved in charitable work for refugees and deeply moved by the plight of Russian Jews—like my grandfather—who had fled to the United States. These are the closing lines of her poem:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

There should always be a place in this country for men, women, and children who are fleeing horror—the same kind of horror that befell so many innocent people in Paris last week. This is not the time to score political points; this is the time when we come together and show leadership. This is the time—this is now the time—when we uphold the values of the United States of America.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Kentucky for the purposes of describing an amendment that he has filed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, make no mistake, we have been attacked in the past by refugees or by people posing as refugees. The two Boston bombers were here as refugees. They didn't take very kindly to what we gave them—education, food, clothing—and they chose to attack our country. In Bowling Green, KY, we had two Iraqi refugees who came through the refugee program, posing as refugees, and then promptly decided to buy Stinger missiles. Fortunately, they bought them from an FBI agent, and we caught them. But when we caught them, we discovered their fingerprints were already on bomb fragments in Iraq in our database, yet we had no clue and admitted them anyway.

I think we have an insufficient process for knowing who is here legally and illegally. We have 11 million people in our country illegally, and 40 percent of them have overstayed their visa. Do we know who they are? Do we know where they are? If we extrapolate those statistics to those who are visiting our country from the Middle East, do we know where the 150,000 students are who say they are going to school in our

country from the Middle East? I don't think we do.

I don't think we should continue adding people to the rolls of those coming from the Middle East until we absolutely know who is in our country and what their intentions are. So my bill says this—my amendment says this: We are not going to bring them here and put them on government assistance.

When the poem beneath the Statue of Liberty said give me your tired, give me your poor, it didn't say come to our country and we will put you on welfare. In those days you came for opportunity. Many Christian churches have supported refugees. My church has supported refugees coming here. That is charity. But when you put them on welfare, that is not charity.

We borrow \$1 million a minute. We don't have enough money to do this; it is a threat to our national security. My amendment would end the housing assistance for refugees in order to send a message to the President: The people have spoken. We are unhappy with your program. If you will not listen to the American people, we will take the money from the purse.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the Senator's amendment. All of us recognize that our first obligation as Americans is to ensure the security and well-being to the extent we can of our citizens. That is our first priority.

There are many flaws in the system for admitting people to this country. Those flaws go beyond the problem of people sneaking into our country illegally or overstaying their visas. They extend to the process we use under the Visa Waiver Program. Indeed, one of our colleagues Senator COATS has introduced a thoughtful bill to have us take a better look at that program and whether it is a way for citizens who have been radicalized to come from Western European countries into our country and to do us harm.

There are many ways we can improve the process. I am working with Senator CANTWELL on a bill having to do with biometrics to make sure we have more information. I look at the Senator's amendment, and he lists 34 countries that would be affected by his prohibition—34 countries. They include countries such as Turkey. Turkey is a NATO ally. Turkey is absolutely vital in the war against ISIS. It includes our strong ally Jordan. If Jordan and Turkey and Lebanon, countries that have already taken in 4 million refugees who are fleeing from Syria, are destabilized, what does that mean for the stability of that entire region?

Mr. President, last month I went on an official trip with several of my colleagues to get a better understanding of the migrant crisis that is engulfing Europe. We traveled to the two countries that are the entry points for

many of the refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and who also are coming from Afghanistan and Iraq and some countries in Africa as well, such as Libya. So we went to Italy, and we went to Greece.

At that time, in the middle of last month, 710,000 individuals had come in through Greece and to Italy to go on to other countries in Western Europe and in Scandinavia. We talked to the officials there, and I was not happy with the responses I received from Greek, Italian, and U.N. officials about their screening of refugees. Even though it is evident that the vast majority of refugees were people who were fearing for their lives and seeking safety, I was worried that ISIS fighters would embed themselves in this flood of refugees.

What the Greeks and the Italians, with help from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, were doing was fingerprinting people, taking their photographs and then essentially sending them on their way. And I asked: Are we comparing these fingerprints, these photos, this other information with our—the American—watch list for terrorists? Are we matching them up against our no-fly list, our TIDE database, which is the larger terrorist watch list? The answer was no, and that needs to change.

I also traveled to a shelter in Athens that was run by Doctors of the World, an organization with which I was previously unfamiliar, and there I met a very young mother with her adorable little girl. They were from Eritrea, and they had been part of the flood of refugees. They pose no harm to our country or to any of the countries in which they might ultimately settle, yet they might need a little bit of assistance, a little bit of help, because the mother was so young and her daughter only about age 2.

I also met two young girls from Afghanistan who both said to me: Please don't take our pictures and put them on Facebook, because we fear for our relatives back in Afghanistan.

Look what has happened in Afghanistan, as the Taliban has regained strength and now is once again oppressing women and girls, denying them an education, forcing them into early marriages.

Another country on this list is Nigeria—certainly a country we have to be very careful about because this is the country where ISIS has a stronghold and where Boko Haram is located. But it is also the country where hundreds of girls were kidnapped for trying to get an education.

In other words, we can't just list 34 countries, some of which are essential to work with us in the war against terrorism, against ISIS, such as Jordan and Turkey. We can't just list all these countries and say they are off limits.

We can't just automatically say no to an Iraqi interpreter who has worked with our special forces and now is in danger of losing his life and having his family slaughtered because he helped

to save Americans' lives in Iraq. Are we saying we will not let a single person from 34 countries into our country no matter how many American lives they have saved, no matter whether they pose a threat to us?

Now, I want to make very clear that I do not think our process for screening people to come into this country is good enough. It is not. If it were good enough, we would not have people who could cause us harm in this country. But, you know, perhaps we should be focusing on those Americans—yes, even Americans—who have become radicalized and have traveled to Syria and Iraq and been trained to plot attacks here in this country: lone-wolf attacks, such as Major Hasan at Fort Hood, an American citizen who was radicalized online by an extremist Islamic cleric.

We can't apply a one-size-fits-all to 34 countries that include a NATO ally and other allies that have been helpful in the war against terrorism or countries that include individuals who have helped the cause, who have saved American lives or who pose no threats to us, such as those two young Afghan girls I met at the shelter or the very young mother with her very young little girl.

We do need to tighten our process. We need to do more. You know, I would think that Members of this body who voted just months ago to weaken our ability, even under court orders, to provide surveillance of those who we suspect would do us harm would think again about what they have done in this time when the threats coming at us have never been greater. But this is a meat ax approach. It is too broad, and it does not really address the problem that we face today. We do need to address that problem. Perhaps we need a pause to redo our processes. But this is not the answer.

Finally, as I read this language, the way it is written, it may apply to refugees who already have been legally admitted to this country. Do we want to do that? We need to think about this. We need to get this right, and Senator PAUL's amendment is far too broad and is not the right answer to what is a real problem.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I associate myself with the comments of Senator COLLINS, who described the amendment extremely well. I, too, rise in opposition to the proposed amendment for all the reasons she listed. She was quite vivid and quite concrete in numerous examples: individuals in Afghanistan who have assisted us who are in jeopardy if they don't get an opportunity to come to the United States and people in Jordan who fight with us each day. Who can fail to recall the horrific scene of the young Jordanian pilot who was burned by ISIS? That was a Jordanian patriot fighting with the United States of America against the common enemy, ISIL. Unfortunately, he is de-

ceased. But to tell his family members and his fellow countrymen that they can't come here as they qualify through rigorous procedures as a refugee and are granted asylum—all these reasons have been so well spoken by Senator COLLINS. So I won't go on, but I want to make clear that I, too, oppose the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CRUDE OIL EXPORT BAN

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I rise today to make the case for lifting the 40-year-old ban on exporting crude oil. Lifting the ban is a smart move and it is long overdue. It will benefit not only my home State of North Dakota but also our Nation and our allies. That is why I am proposing to include legislation lifting the ban in the new highway bill that Congress is on track to pass this month.

The highway bill is must-pass legislation, and the benefits of allowing crude oil exports are multiple. Taken together, they make a powerful case for allowing our producers to market their product on the world markets. Doing so would enhance domestic production, increase the global supply of crude oil, grow our economy, create good-paying jobs for our people, and make our Nation more secure. So let's look at these benefits one by one.

First and foremost, crude oil exports will benefit American consumers. The price of oil is based on supply and demand—the more oil on the market, the lower the price. The volatility and the global price of crude oil are felt right down to the consumer level. More global supply means lower prices for gasoline and other fuels and more money in consumers' pockets. Those facts are backed up by studies at both the U.S. Energy Information Administration and the nonpartisan Brookings Institution.

This spring, EIA Administrator Adam Sieminski confirmed these findings in testimony before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, on which I serve, as does the Presiding Officer. In September, the EIA released a new report that reaffirms the benefits to consumers and businesses that would result from lifting the decades-old crude oil export ban.

Second, in addition to benefiting consumers, crude oil exports will benefit the American economy. Crude oil exports will increase revenues and boost overall economic growth. It will help increase wages, create jobs, and improve our balance of trade.

The one area of our economy that currently enjoys a favorable balance of trade is agriculture. That is because our farmers and ranchers successfully market their products around the globe.

Our crude oil producers should be allowed to do the same. Local economies

also benefit. Service industries, retail, and other businesses in communities centered on oil development would see more economic activity and growth if this antiquated ban is lifted.

Crude oil exports will also benefit the U.S. energy industry. The EIA's latest study concluded that lifting the ban will reduce the discount for light sweet crude oil produced in States such as my State of North Dakota, as well as Texas and other States, and encourage more investment in domestic energy production.

The drop in the price of oil this year has slowed domestic production, but we continue to produce oil. Today my State of North Dakota produces about 1.16 million barrels of oil a day, only down slightly from our peak of more than 1.2 million barrels of oil a day. The reason is that our producers are resilient and innovative. They are developing new technologies and new techniques to become more cost effective and efficient all the time. The American energy industry is here to stay.

The energy sector, moreover, provides high-paying jobs for our people. We know that from experience in North Dakota, which has had the fastest growing rate of per capita personal income in the country among all the States in recent years.

On a national level, crude oil exports will help to bring our energy policy into the 21st century. The crude oil export ban is an economic strategy implemented in the 1970s, and the world has changed dramatically since then. Back then, conventional wisdom was that there was a finite quantity of oil in the world and we pretty much knew where it was. Nobody envisioned the kind of energy revolution we are seeing in States such as North Dakota, Texas, Colorado, and many others. Consequently, the model has shifted from scarcity to abundance, and we need to have a comprehensive approach to energy that reflects the new reality. That means we need additional investments in technology, transportation, and energy infrastructure, such as pipelines, rail, roads, and other industry needs. By leveraging our natural resources and American innovation, the United States is in a position to demonstrate real global energy leadership.

Last but not least, crude oil exports will strengthen national security. U.S. crude oil will provide strategic geopolitical benefits, not only for us but also for our friends around the globe. It will provide our allies with alternative sources of oil and free them from their reliance on energy from Russia, Venezuela, Iran, and other unstable parts of the world.

As a further security advantage, adding more supply would add a buffer against volatile events in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. We finally have an opportunity to curb the disproportionate influence OPEC has had on the world oil market for 5 decades, and we need to do it. The Presi-

dent's deal with Iran lifts sanctions against Iranian oil, bringing 1 million barrels a day of their product on to global markets. Clearly, it is inconsistent for us to maintain a ban on U.S. oil exports while the President lifts a ban on Iranian exports, sending jobs, revenues, and economic growth to places such as Iran while blocking the same benefits for American citizens.

The ban on crude oil exports has long outlived its usefulness, and repealing it is long overdue. For consumers, jobs, the economy, and national security, we need to come together and lift the ban. We can do that by including legislation lifting the crude oil ban in the bipartisan highway bill set to pass Congress this month.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

JAMES ZADROGA 9/11 HEALTH AND COMPENSATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, 14 years ago on November 17, 2001, families across New Jersey were still struggling with the grief of empty seats at dinner tables and closets full of clothes never to be worn again. It was 14 years ago that the news headlines were reflecting on one of the greatest tragedies our country had ever witnessed, which were the attacks on 9/11 of the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania.

Today, the trauma for that is no longer as raw as it once was, yet we are still affected forever, and much still tries the soul of our Nation. While the Sun still rises, the seasons still change, the wounds of that day may never heal. There are so many families across New Jersey who are still struggling with the aftermath of this terror, with the illnesses of loved ones who survived and who served as first responders in the 9/11 attacks.

While the debris has long been cleared and new towers now stand at the World Trade Center site, many of the thousands of brave first responders who sacrificed their safety for the good of our country are still battling very serious health issues. The exposure to debris, to dust, to other hazardous materials and chemicals on September 11 and the weeks and months that followed have caused countless chronic medical problems for tens of thousands of Americans, including many New Jerseyans. They and their families are still burdened every single day with the physical, emotional, and financial costs of the attacks on 9/11.

For too long in the wake of the attacks, there were significant gaps in the access and quality of care for survivors. One such survivor, James Zadroga, an NYPD officer and former

Ocean County, NJ, resident, struggled with accessing care to treat his severe and chronic respiratory problems after serving as first responder in the wake of September 11, where we believe he acquired those serious health problems. James passed away just over 4 years after the attacks at the age of 34.

Thanks to the advocacy of the Zadroga family and the State and Federal lawmakers—people like Senator Lautenberg and Senator MENENDEZ—a bill was passed into law to provide health care, treatment, and compensation for survivors like James Zadroga who are dealing with the aftermath and effects of the 9/11 attacks. Because of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010, over 70,000 first responders and survivors are now enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Program and receiving quality care.

Over 5,000 survivors and first responders still require medical treatment because of their exposure and/or their service as first responders and because of the Zadroga act, they have had access. Because Congress failed to act, the World Trade Center Health Program expired in September 2015, and without congressional action, funding for the program will run out by next year. Additionally, funding for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund will likely expire around the same time next year as well.

Earlier this month, the editorial board of one New Jersey newspaper, the Star-Ledger, had this to say about this body's failure to act:

The bill has overwhelming support from both parties. They understand this is an American problem, with victims from all 50 states, and they know this legislative solution is not radical. We take care of workers with dangerous jobs . . . especially heroes who risked their lives to help humanity while most of us watched from home, paralyzed by grief.

We have not just a patriotic responsibility but a moral obligation to ensure that the Americans who sacrificed so much for the good of our country in the wake of September 11, 2001, are treated with the respect and care they deserve. They are our heroes. They are our champions. They stood up and worked when many ran.

It is incumbent upon this Congress to follow the lead of Senator GILLIBRAND and heed the calls coming from our constituents to pass the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Reauthorization Act. I am proud to stand with Senator GILLIBRAND and our colleagues in the Senate and in the House, advocates, and first responders who are urgently calling for the passage of this necessary legislation that reflects our values and our ideals.

I wish to close with the words of a courageous Newark Fire Department captain who responded to the 9/11 attacks at great personal risk and had the following to share with my office about the renewal of the Zadroga act:

As a member of New Jersey Task Force I, I responded on 9/11. This volunteer State Police team, participated in numerous search

and rescue operations on that day. The thousands of firefighters that worked that day, developed medical issues thereafter, including myself. I have had three surgeries for thyroid cancer. I also developed the 9/11 cough, and have developed side effects from radiation treatment. . . . We are not looking to get rich. We just want to be able to continue serving as firefighters, without worrying about our health because of 9/11.

Those in this Chamber who somehow, remarkably, oppose this bill need to hear this man's words and my own as well. We cannot fail to act. By what we do here now, we not only take care of those heroes from 9/11 but we send a message to all Americans about how we stand up for those who stood for us, who fought for us. When the most perilous times came to be, they were there for us. This country is a nation that takes care of its heroes.

What we do here with this legislation will forever highlight this ideal and celebrate its truth or it will cast a dark shadow over it. I hope today and in the coming days that we move this legislation forward and be the light upon the great men and women who are so patriotically dedicated to our Nation.

Mr. President, before I yield the floor, I would like to also talk briefly about the Transportation appropriations bill this Chamber is considering.

I truly appreciate the hard work that Senator REED and Senator COLLINS have done to get this bill to a place that makes critical investments in transportation and housing and, in particular, for some of our most vulnerable citizens. Their work has been tireless, and I am happy to see much of the progress they are making.

However, this appropriations bill as it currently stands includes some provisions that would weaken highway safety. At a time when 4,000 people are losing their lives annually on American highways and 100,000 are injured due to large truck crashes, it is paramount that Congress do more to improve safety, not remove evidence-based safety policies.

New Jersey alone has some 38,000 miles of public roads that connect people of our State and get them where they need to be. It drives much of the commerce and economy of our State every day. New Jersey is strategically placed, which makes it a very important path through the State and for goods up and down the east coast as well. These roads also see a tremendous amount of truck traffic at all times of the day and night. If you have ever driven on the New Jersey Turnpike, you know what I mean.

I am concerned that we saw an increase in truck accidents from 2009 to 2012, an increase in crash injuries by 40 percent, and truck crash fatalities during this time have increased 16 percent. This is data. These are numbers. But they are also human lives; they are fellow Americans who have had their lives shattered by horrific accidents.

Truckdriver fatigue is a leading cause of these major truck accidents.

These drivers who work extremely long days delivering the goods we depend upon deserve basic protections allowing them to get sufficient rest to do their job.

I filed an amendment on the hours of service rules, which were put in place to prevent truckdriver fatigue and ensure that the rules put in place after years of study and robust stakeholder feedback would still be enforceable. Some people believe we should suspend these rules, these commonsense policies, by calling for even more study. My amendment ensures the rules will remain enforceable while further study is conducted so that we don't see more lives put at risk as a result of these delay tactics. What we should be doing is ensuring that safety is first. If it proves not necessary, then pull back.

There are other provisions in this bill that I believe could jeopardize highway safety as well. I am pleased, though, that earlier today we were able to work together and pass an amendment to further study a proposal to allow heavier trucks, longer trucks on the road. Heavier trucks could cause greater damage and destruction to human life and property when these accidents occur. I am grateful to my colleagues for working together on this.

A final example of a commonsense provision we in Congress should address as we work to improve highway safety is the minimum level of insurance required by truckdrivers. When truck crashes do occur and the insurance doesn't cover the cost of these accidents, taxpayers are left to front the bill. We should look to the decades-old minimum levels of insurance and assess whether those minimum insurance standards need to be raised so that families torn apart by truck crashes aren't then thrust into debt because of medical bills.

I have met with some of these families. I have sat with them and heard their stories about how low levels of minimum insurance have left them in dire straits. As taxpayers, we should not be left without the funding to rebuild damaged roads and bridges in the aftermath of such significant crashes. It is time to modernize a minimum level of insurance for truckdrivers so that we are all better equipped in the aftermath of an accident.

Again, I have sat with far too many survivors and their family members. I have seen, talked, and engaged with them, hearing the truth of their stories. We cannot sit silently while truck accidents are increasing in our country and allow commonsense safety to be rolled back in these spending bills. Where there are meaningful and practical solutions to pressing highway safety challenges, these are discussions we need to have. This is a fight worth having, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to improve the safety on our Nation's highways. We have the capability, we have the know-how, and we have the science to help us to begin to reduce

these tragic accidents and fatalities on our highways.

I believe we should show greater urgency in protecting human life and protecting Americans as they ride along our roads.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, very shortly we are going to be adjourning for a very important briefing, but first I feel I should just briefly respond to my friend from New Jersey on a few of the points he raised. I recognize that he is not a member of the Appropriations Committee, and I doubt he was hanging on my every word when I described what was in the bill earlier today, but the fact is we have some very important truck safety provisions that are in the bill. For example, we require the Department to issue long-delayed regulations that deal with requiring speed governors that limit the speed at which trucks can travel. That rulemaking has been delayed an astonishing 22 times. We require the Department to proceed to issue those rules within 60 days of the enactment of this bill. That is a very important provision.

If my colleague is worried about truckdrivers exceeding the speed limit and causing an accident, he should be applauding this bill, which says to the Department, in no uncertain terms: Stop delaying. It is past time to issue this regulation.

Another very important safety provision that is in this bill has to do with requiring electronic logs. This is an important safety provision because it will prevent those few bad actors in the trucking industry from falsifying their paper logs. We will know for certain how long they were behind the wheel and on the road, and we will know whether they are complying with the hours of service provisions. Those are just two of the very important provisions my friend from New Jersey may not be aware of given that he does not serve on the committee and may not have heard my speech this morning.

The Senator from New Jersey also mentioned other issues, such as the insurance requirements. I want to make it very clear to my colleagues that our bill does not prohibit the Department from proceeding with a rulemaking that might increase the minimum insurance requirement, but what it says, in a very logical way, is it should assess the impact—the impact on the insurance market, the impact on the truckdrivers, and the impact on the insurance industry. The fact is that approximately only 1 percent of crashes that occur exceed what is now the minimum insurance requirement. I still think it is worth looking at because it has been many years since this issue has been reviewed. We don't block the rulemaking. We just make sure there is a report that assesses what the impact is before the Department imposes what

could be a huge and unnecessary financial burden.

I did feel it was important to clarify those three points. There is much else I could say about this issue, but I recognize that undoubtedly the Presiding Officer and others are eager to get to the briefing.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 5:05 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 6:25 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PERDUE).

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The majority leader.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for the Collins substitute amendment No. 2812.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Senate amendment No. 2812, the substitute amendment to H.R. 2577, an act making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Susan M. Collins, Jerry Moran, John Boozman, Steve Daines, John Hoeven, Cory Gardner, Dan Sullivan, Joni Ernst, Daniel Coats, Johnny Isakson, Orrin G. Hatch, Lamar Alexander, Mike Crapo, Richard Burr, Shelley Moore Capito, Michael B. Enzi.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk for the underlying bill, H.R. 2577.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 138, H.R. 2577, an act making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Susan M. Collins, Jerry Moran, John Boozman, Steve

Daines, John Hoeven, Cory Gardner, Dan Sullivan, Daniel Coats, Johnny Isakson, Orrin G. Hatch, Lamar Alexander, Mike Crapo, Richard Burr, Shelley Moore Capito, Michael B. Enzi, Joni Ernst.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call under rule XXII with respect to the cloture motions be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I wish to speak about an amendment I plan on offering tomorrow to the Transportation bill we are working on right now on the Senate floor. It is a common-sense amendment. It is an amendment about safety. It is an amendment about protecting our citizens. It is an amendment about cutting through redtape. It is an amendment about what the vast majority of Americans want us to do in the Senate, which is to start to get things done in this body. It is a simple amendment.

This is what my amendment does. It would allow States and communities throughout this country of ours the ability to expedite the Federal permitting process, the regulatory process on the construction and rebuilding of bridges. It is pretty simple. It doesn't get much more simple than that.

Everybody needs infrastructure. Every community in America needs bridges. It would only apply to bridges—critical pieces of infrastructure—bridges that are built in the same place, the same size, bridges that in the United States are falling apart.

We have talked about this on the Senate floor for the last several months. Our Nation's infrastructure is crumbling. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives America's infrastructure a D-plus. We are failing. For our infrastructure, in the classroom, we are the D-plus students.

This is, of course, bad for our Nation's economy. There is nothing more central to a country that wants to grow its economy, that wants to compete globally, than sound infrastructure for transportation. In a country of our size facing economic challenges, America's infrastructure can either drive growth and opportunity or it can slow down growth and opportunity and undermine it. Right now, that is what we are doing. We are slowing it down. We are undermining it. It is worse than that. It is worse than just undermining our own economic opportunity. The state of our infrastructure is actually dangerous for our citizens.

I agree that we must have stable funding for infrastructure. That is why I have been a strong supporter of the DRIVE Act and this bill, in terms of a 6-year highway bill, under the DRIVE Act. But we also need to focus on something else that is driving up the cost of our Nation's infrastructure: redtape that is stopping critical projects in America from moving forward. Like so

many construction projects in this country, the environmental review process our bridges face is deathly slow and cumbersome and enormously expensive. We live in a redtape nation, particularly when it comes to infrastructure. We can't build the way we used to in this country.

Consider just a few statistics. The average time for environmental reviews for a major transportation project in the United States in 2011 was 8 years. That is up from 3½ years just 10 years earlier. The average environmental impact statement when NEPA was written was 22 pages. Now the average environmental impact statement is over 1,000 pages.

Let me give one example that came up in the Commerce Committee. We were talking about airport infrastructure—again, critical to the country. Seattle had built a new runway. When I asked the witness who was in charge of that runway how long it took to build, he said 3 years. That is a pretty long time, but it is a big runway, kind of complicated. Then I asked how long it took to get the Federal permits and regulatory permission from the Federal Government to build that new runway. The answer: 15 years. Fifteen years. The entire room gasped.

No American wants this. We need to do a lot more to get back to common-sense permitting and regulatory reform for America's infrastructure.

So we are starting on critical pieces of infrastructure that everybody can agree with. That is what this amendment does. It focuses solely on bridges. Our bridges are an increasingly important issue. One in 10 of our Nation's bridges—roughly 607,000 bridges in the United States—is structurally insufficient. Let me repeat that in a different way. In the United States, there are more than 600,000 bridges in need of repair. The average age of our bridges is 42 years old. So we need to repair them. We need to rebuild them. But what we don't need is the Federal Government taking 6 to 7 or 8 to 9 years to give us permission to rebuild bridges. There is not one American who thinks that would be a good idea. Yet, if we keep the law the same, that is exactly what is going to happen.

Communities need to rebuild bridges, and it is going to take several years to get permission from agencies in this town to allow them to do it. To do what? To build on the same land, to just build a bridge. We need to change that.

Thousands of communities across the country are simply keeping their fingers crossed when Americans cross structurally deficient bridges 215 million times a day. Let me repeat that. In this great country, Americans cross structurally deficient bridges 215 million times a day. So we need to fix them. They are being crossed by our trucks, carrying our Nation's commerce, our children in schoolbuses, parents trying to get home in time for dinner. These are people we should be protecting.